

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

For the
Mexicali II Wastewater Treatment System

PROJECT LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is considering authorizing the award of a Border Environment Infrastructure Fund (BEIF) grant to the Comisión Estatal de Servicios Públicos de Mexicali (CESPM), the local utility, for construction of a force main, pump station, new wastewater treatment plant (WWTP), and purchase of emergency pumping equipment. Mexicali, a municipality of around 800,000 people, is located just south of Calexico, California in Baja California, Mexico.

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

Wastewater generated by the Mexicali II service area was originally intended to be treated at a proposed new wastewater treatment plant in El Choropo, but this plant was not built because of public opposition from local residents. Consequently, approximately 14-16 million gallons per day (mgd) of untreated wastewater continues to enter the New River. This river originates 20 river miles south of the border, and travels 65 river miles through Calexico and the Imperial Valley, before emptying into the Salton Sea.

The new proposal by Mexico is to build this Wastewater Treatment Plant in a relatively uninhabited area known as Las Arenitas, located approximately 33 km (20.6 miles) south of the border. The pipeline, pump station, and WWTP will be sized to treat and convey 20.1 mgd (880 lps) to accommodate flows until the year 2014. A pumping station will be constructed, and 19 km (11.8 miles) more pipeline will be installed, given the increase in distance to the new location of the wastewater treatment plant.

The treated wastewater will be discharged south of the New River drainage basin, into a tributary of the Rio Hardy, which empties into the Colorado River Delta. The wastewater will therefore no longer enter the New River. This will result in a reduction of flows to the New River at the border of about 11% and a decrease of flows into the Salton Sea of about 1%. This will also reduce total phosphorous and orthophosphate loadings to the Salton Sea by 10% and loadings of total suspended solids (TSS) and biological oxygen demand (BOD₅) in the New River at the International boundary by over 40% and 60% respectively.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES AND CONDITIONS

In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act, EPA has prepared an environmental assessment (EA) that examines the potential environmental impacts of the proposed project in the U.S. (i.e. cross-boundary impacts). After considering a wide range of regulatory, environmental (both natural and human) and socio-economic factors, the EA did not identify any significant impacts to the environment that would result from the implementation of this project.

Environmental impacts in Mexico are addressed in the *Manifestacion de Impacto Ambiental: Modalidad Particular; Sector Hidráulico del Proyecto de Sanamiento de Mexicali, Baja California*, which was prepared in accordance with Instituto Nacional de Ecología. This analysis supports a determination that the proposed infrastructure program will not have a significant adverse impact on human health and the environment in Mexico.

PUBLIC REVIEW

The EA is on file, along with other project materials, and is available for public inspection at the EPA Region 9 office in San Francisco, California. A copy of the EA is also available for public review in Calexico at the Camarena Memorial Library, 850 Encinas Avenue, Calexico, CA 92231 (contact: Sandra Tauler).

To obtain additional information about the project, please contact Doug Liden by email at: liden.douglas@epa.gov or by calling (415) 972-3406.

Interested persons, including those who disagree with this proposal, may submit comments to EPA Region 9 within 30 calendar days from the date this document is issued. No administrative action will be taken on this proposed project prior to the expiration of this comment period, which ends September 9, 2003. Comments, via letter, fax or email, should be sent to Doug Liden at the address listed below.

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After EPA assesses any comments received, those comments, EPA's responses, and this Finding of No Significant Impact (FNSI) will be forwarded to the Regional Administrator for review and signature. If the Regional Administrator signs this FNSI, it will not be re-circulated for review, but will be available to any individual upon request.

FINDING

After review of the EA and any comments received, EPA has determined that the proposed project will not have a significant impact on the environment and that an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared for this project.

Wayne Nastri
Regional Administrator

Date

